



Canadian
Pharmacists
Association
Association des
pharmaciens
du Canada

The Weekly

Latest pharmacy developments in response to COVID-19

May 12, 2021

CPhA

Pharmacists getting the job done

In a new [blog post](#), CPhA Chair Christina Tulk reflects on the role pharmacists are playing in the COVID-19 vaccination efforts. From recognition in the media and at the highest levels of government, to the gaps and missed opportunities to further leverage pharmacists, Tulk highlights how the profession has been carving out its role as the unsung workhorse of the vaccine rollout.

New COVID Conversations webinar recordings now available

In case you missed the live sessions, the recordings for our 2 most recent webinars are now available. Both sessions, [Moving the needle from vaccine hesitancy to vaccine confidence](#) and [The SARS-CoV-2 virus: Variants, epidemiology and impact on pharmacy](#), brought together expert panellists who shared information, expertise and resources to help pharmacists continue to provide critical care to their patients through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Updated chart: Pharmacy involvement in COVID-19 vaccination

As COVID-19 vaccination rollouts continue, CPhA is making weekly updates to our Pharmacy Involvement in COVID Vaccination map, staying on top of the role pharmacists are playing in the vaccination effort. The graphic is available in [English](#) and [French](#).

CPhA's COVID-19 web pages are being updated regularly at www.pharmacists.ca/covid19 and

Provincial

All adults can book COVID-19 vaccine at select Ontario hot-spot pharmacies

Nearly 140 pharmacies started offering COVID-19 vaccines to all adults in some Ontario virus hot spots this past weekend, a shift made to align with provincial efforts to protect the most vulnerable amid a third wave of infections, [according to the CBC](#). The government website lists 78 pharmacy locations in Toronto and Peel Region that now offer the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to people aged 18 and older. In Durham Region, Hamilton, Ottawa, Windsor and York Region, 58 pharmacies are offering the Moderna shot to anyone in that age group. Justin Bates, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists Association, said his organization had been working with the province to bring the mRNA shots to more pharmacies for some time, with Pfizer-BioNTech shots being offered at 16 initial locations a week earlier. Prior to that, pharmacies had only been cleared to administer doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to those 40 and older.

Provinces look to mix COVID-19 vaccines in light of changing supply

Ontario has become the latest province to signal it will likely mix COVID-19 vaccine brands as the country prepares for a flood of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots, while some doctors question further use of AstraZeneca, [reports the Canadian Press](#). On May 10 Health Minister Christine Elliott said that it is likely that Ontarians who have received a dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine may get a different shot for their second dose. Quebec has also said that it plans to mix vaccines due to supply shortages, substituting the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for Moderna in order to quickly give booster shots to long-term care residents. Dr. Theresa Tam, the country's top doctor, has also said that Canada is closely following the results of the UK study on mixing doses.

National

SDM launches rapid COVID-19 screening programs to help employers safely operate and reopen

Shoppers Drug Mart (SDM) is [offering COVID-19 antigen screening options](#) for employers who want a quick and convenient tool to more safely operate or reopen their businesses. Rapid antigen tests can provide results within 15-20 minutes, giving workplaces additional and readily accessible information to help keep their employees safe. SDM has 2 programs available for businesses depending on an employer's size, need and location. In partnership with the Government of Canada, small and medium-sized employers operating in Ontario hot spots with close-contact workplaces can now pick up rapid antigen testing kits at more than 40 SDM pharmacies. Shoppers Drug Mart has also launched an employer-based program that leverages an innovative online portal to support employees as they complete self-assessments, book screening appointments and view results. This program provides employers with operational dashboards and consolidated reporting to help employers monitor the safety of their workforce.

In Ontario and Alberta, screening can be done at participating SDM and Loblaw pharmacy locations. In other provinces, alternative screening options are available.

COVID vaccines and restrictions can lead to better summer for Canadians: Trudeau

On May 11 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that Canadians can expect a much better summer, but only if they get vaccinated and continue to follow health restrictions to push COVID cases down to low levels, [reports the National Post](#). “If we can do this, we can have a more normal, better summer and a one-dose summer sets us up for a two-dose fall,” he said. He said he expects there will be enough doses to give every Canadian one dose by the end of June and 2 doses by the end of September. He said some restrictions will likely fall after Canadians get 1 dose and more still will fall after they receive 2. But Trudeau stressed the number of COVID cases has to drop as well and people have to follow public health restrictions to make that happen.

Canadian officials watching the data on alternating COVID-19 vaccines

As some experts continue to warn of very rare side effects associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine, Canadian health officials are now reviewing the research on mixing various COVID-19 shots, [reports the CBC](#). A study of a “mismatched” vaccine regimen is currently underway in the UK, but some scientists say there’s reason to believe that administering 2 doses of different products could boost a person’s immune response beyond what can be achieved by giving the same shot twice. Researchers at Oxford University in the UK launched a study in early February to explore the possible benefits of alternating different COVID-19 vaccines. According to the lead scientists, the study is “looking for clues as to how to increase the breadth of protection against new virus strains.” The study team told CBC News that it is “anticipating sharing data in the next week or so.” Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s chief public health officer, said last week that the current guidance is for AstraZeneca recipients to get a second dose of the same product, but the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) is reviewing the Oxford research on mixing AstraZeneca with an mRNA shot. “There will be further advice forthcoming on that second dose based on the evolving science,” Tam said.

Poll shows vaccine confidence in Canada holds steady despite AstraZeneca safety concerns

A new Leger poll suggests that Canadian confidence in COVID-19 vaccines is holding firm despite confusion and concern about the safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine, [says the Canadian Press](#). More than 8 in 10 Canadian respondents said they are either vaccinated already or plan to be when it’s their turn—almost identical results from a similar poll taken a month ago. That overall confidence comes despite the potential link to a rare but serious blood clotting syndrome linked to the AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccines. In the 2 weeks before the poll was taken, 12 Canadians were diagnosed with vaccine-induced thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT) and 3 of them died out of more than 2 million people vaccinated with AstraZeneca. NACI recommends that people at low risk from COVID-19 wait to get vaccinated until they can access Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna rather than get AstraZeneca immediately; it said the same thing

about J&J on May 3. Confidence in those vaccines is down following those remarks. More than 8 in 10 people surveyed said they trust Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, which aren't linked to the clots. Comparatively fewer than half those surveyed expressed trust in AstraZeneca or J&J. A month ago almost 7 in 10 Canadians had confidence in J&J and a little more than half in AstraZeneca.

International

Walgreens survey finds COVID vaccination has positive impact on mental health

As more Americans get vaccinated against COVID-19, a Walgreens survey is gauging the impact that getting vaccinated has on patients, [reports Drug Store News](#). According to the survey, 73% of vaccinated respondents felt that getting vaccinated had a positive impact on their mental health, and 67% said they felt vaccination would benefit their physical health as well. Among the 1500 partially and fully vaccinated people who completed the online survey, 64% said they felt relieved after getting vaccinated, with thankfulness and optimism rounding out the top 3 feelings. "Our pharmacy staff and store team members have seen first-hand some of the emotion from customers and patients — having endured the past year of the pandemic, and now, recognizing the vaccine can be the catalyst to getting back to the people, and the things they truly value and have missed the most," said Rina Shah, Walgreens group vice president of pharmacy operations and services.

US pharmacies told to offer second vaccine doses to people who got first shots elsewhere

US federal health officials say they are directing nearly all drugstores and grocery store pharmacies to offer second doses of COVID-19 vaccines to people who received their first shot from a different provider, [reports the New York Times](#). Growing numbers of Americans who received a first shot of the 2-dose Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine are not getting their second shots, in part because of challenges with access. The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than 5 million people, or nearly 8% of those who are partially vaccinated, have missed getting their second dose.

US approves Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds

On May 10, US regulators authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for use in children as young as 12, widening the country's inoculation program, as vaccination rates have slowed significantly, [according to Reuters](#). The vaccine has been available under an emergency use authorization (EUA) to people as young as 16 in the US. The vaccine makers said they had started the process for full approval for those ages last week. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said it was amending the EUA to include the millions of children aged 12 to 15. It is the first COVID-19 vaccine to be authorized in the United States for this age group and is seen as an important step for getting children back into schools safely. Health Canada approved use of the Pfizer-BioNTech shot for kids as young as 12 on May 5. US President Joe Biden has asked states to make the vaccine available to the younger adolescents immediately.

Pharmacy on the front line

“Every shift is like a 12-hour workout”

In March, Brampton, ON-based pharmacist Aska Patel got an email from her employer asking if she'd volunteer to work in a hospital that was hit hard with COVID-19. Patel agreed, and in April she was redeployed to the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre in Barrie, ON. In this [Toronto Life](#) first-person account, Patel explains how it all happened.

In-depth

What does the science say about AstraZeneca? A blood clot expert weighs in

There's a new bump in the road to mass vaccination against COVID-19 in Canada. Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan announced on May 11 that they will no longer administer first doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Reasons cited for this abrupt shift include claims of uncertain supply and worries about the rare risk of blood clots from the vaccine. However, authorities in other provinces have said they do not plan to pause AstraZeneca inoculations, and federal health officials say they still consider the vaccine safe to use in most populations. To help Canadians understand what the science says about the AstraZeneca vaccine, CTV News Anchor Lisa LaFlamme [spoke with](#) Dr. Menaka Pai of McMaster University in Hamilton, ON. Pai is a blood clot expert and a member of Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table.

Worth repeating

“AstraZeneca accounts for about 12% of the vaccines administered in Canada – and about 99% of the grief.” — The Globe and Mail's Andre Picard [wonders if AstraZeneca's woes](#) are creating vaccine hesitancy and, if there are alternatives available, is it worth having it on offer?

This weekly COVID-19 update is compiled by the Canadian Pharmacists Association. Please note that this publication is meant to inform and is not a comprehensive list of information available. Be sure to check with your provincial regulatory authority or advocacy association for province-specific information. While we aim to ensure all information contained in this update is accurate, the situation is evolving rapidly and CPhA does not take responsibility for the content provided by other organizations and sources.

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